

Prayer Meeting

CLOTHED WITH HUMILITY.

Week Beginning Sept. 12. 1 Peter 5:16.

If we were to select the book of the New Testament, or of the whole Bible that is devoted most fully and exclusively to practical Christian living, it would be this First Epistle of Peter. It is characteristic of inspiration that practical duties are closely associated with doctrinal exposition, but this epistle is richly, intently and absorbingly experimental.

As elsewhere, we find that, important doctrines emerge in the unfolding of experimental duties. The important doctrine of the divinely appointed office of the eldership is in this context clearly recognized and announced. This passage compared with passages dealing with the same subject in the epistle to Timothy and Titus indicate clearly the scripturalness of the office of elder and bishop and that they are one, involving the same authority and duties. Peter, in justifying himself in giving instruction to elders, mentions first that he holds the same office, then that he has the extraordinary qualification of an apostle in that he had witnessed the sufferings of Christ, and that he was a partaker with them of the glory that was to be revealed.

The general duty assigned them was to "tend" the flock of God. They were to be shepherds to the flock, which meant that they should guide, feed, protect, train them. This required counsel, prayer, exhortation, administration, example. The Master had said to Peter, "Feed my sheep" and the apostle doubtless remembered these words when he gave instructions to his fellow elders. Their comprehensive duty was to be overseers of the flock. The office was liable to be perverted; they were therefore instructed to render their services willingly and freely not of constraint, "nor yet for filthy lucre but of a ready mind." They were not to "lord it" over God's heritage but to be examples to the flock. The promise is made that when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, they shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. This is the reward of faithfulness in any relation that we may sustain to the Church, but especially promised here to the bishop of the congregations. Clement of Alexandria said, "He is a true minister of the counsel of God who doeth and teacheth the things of the Lord, not accounted righteous because he is a presbyter, but because righteous, chosen into the presbytery." Bernard of Clairvaux wrote to Pope Eugene, "Peter could not give thee what he had not. What he had he gave: the care over the church, not dominion." He further says of certain who would lord it over God's heritage, "A monstrosity it is to see the highest rank joined with the lowest life, a grandiloquent tongue with a lazy life, much talking with no fruit."

The "all of you" which follows instructions to elders and to younger men applies to the entire congregation, who were to cultivate the spirit of meekness, deferring to the wishes and judgments of their brethren. They were to be clothed, literally "girded" with humility, a word used to describe the fastening of a slave's dress.

Humility is an inclusive grace blending others into harmonious consistency. Augustine says, "Humility is the vessel of all graces." On the contrary pride is a disorganizer, the course of discord. Says Gerhard, "Other sins flee from God; pride alone opposeth itself to God: therefore, God in turn also opposes himself to the proud." Such is the reason assigned for the statement that "God resisteth the proud," and the familiar teaching of Scripture that "he that exalteth himself shall be abased."

It is an unquestionable dictate of wisdom that we shall be clothed with humility. How dare a sin-besmirched soul exalt itself before God or before men? Knowing itself to be defiled and deformed what effrontery to be parading its gross blemishes as though they were not. Honesty demands of the guilty man that he humble himself.

A final consideration is that humility is fertile soil for the cultivation of other graces. A self-sufficient and self-satisfied soul feels no need of cultivating character, hence pride and strength of character are not found in the same life. That pride and meekness or gentleness, or patience, or faith, or

love should dwell together in the same breast, is unthinkable. If we would nourish these graces we must cast off pride and be clothed with humility.

Young People's Societies

VANITY FAIR.

Topic for Sunday, September 19.—Pilgrim's Progress Series IX. Vanity Fair. Ecclesiastics 1:12-18; 2:1-11.

DAILY READINGS.

Monday: A stranger here. 1 Peter 2:11-25.

Tuesday: A passing pageant. 1 John 2:15-17.

Wednesday: Satan's offer. Matthew 4:8-11.

Thursday: What is not vanity? Hebrews 12:25-28.

Friday: Made a spectacle. 1 Corinthians 4:6-13.

Saturday: The end of vanity. Revelation 18:1-8; 21:15.

"I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshy lusts, which war against the soul."

This warning and appeal come from the apostle's recognition of the fact that all believers are yet "in the flesh."

As long as believers are "in the flesh," the allurements of the old life will be thrusting themselves upon them, seeking to win them from Christ.

A "Vanity Fair" lies in the way of the truest disciples. It is for them not to shut their eyes to its dangers or to persuade themselves that it is not in existence, but to prepare to put it safely behind them.

"Vanity" is the appropriate name given the city in which the world and the flesh hold out their allurements to souls, and its "Fair" runs all the year round. There is no cessation in temptation.

The allurements of "Vanity Fair" are not only in the form of amusements, pleasures, lusts, but also in the form of houses, lands, business, trade, places, honors, and the like, which appeal to the ambition and pride of men.

"Vanity Fair" adjusts its temptations to all classes. In his dream Bunyan saw a row for each of the nations. Satan is adroit in his methods. He skillfully adapts himself to each case.

Through this city the Christian pilgrim must needs pass. It lies in his way. "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil."

The Christians who are true to their faith are apt to be much ridiculed in Vanity Fair. They will be dubbed "Outlandishmen." Effort will be made to put contempt upon them unless they conform to its ways and speech and dress.

The great aim of the believer, when sorely pressed to engage in the world's business, should be to "buy the truth, and sell it not." This may anger the world. It may so offend that loss and imprisonment may result. But whatever the cost, truth should be the Christian's one great aim.

"Faithful" may have to pay forfeit with his life for his testimony against the world, but if he does, chariots and horses from heaven will convey him from the stake to the presence of the God to whose truth he bore witness, and he will stand with Enoch and Elijah there.

From the ashes of the fires that burn God's people, new strength will come. Going out of Vanity Fair and from the tragic end of Faithful, the Pilgrim was joined by Hopeful, thenceforth his constant companion. Hopeful was "made so" by beholding the behavior of Christian and Faithful.

Envy, Superstition, Love-lust, Live-loose, Hate-light, High-mind and like names are fit titles for those who dwell in Vanity Fair, while above all Hate-good rules and judges. But what matters to the believer that all these be against him? "We are the sons of God. Therefore the world knoweth us not because it knew him not."

"Well Faithful, thou hast faithfully profest
Unto thy Lord; with whom thou shalt be blest,
When faithless ones, with all their vain delights,
Are crying out under their hellish plights:
Sing, Faithful, sing; and let thy name survive;
For though they killed thee, thou art yet alive."